
Accessing Alternative Histories and Futures: Afro-Latin American Models for the Digital Humanities

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Introduction

The field of the digital humanities has broadened substantially in the last few years, and this expansion has, in its turn, intensified debates about digital diversity and accessibility. These debates have emerged from the realization that, in spite of the euphoria created by visions of a "flat" digital landscape with access for all, the results to date do not measure up to such expectations. New associations with languages and academic methodologies that differ from those of the global North are promoting initiatives to investigate questions of access to technologies associated with the digital humanities. Despite these contributions by organizations such as the Post Colonial Digital Humanities (DHPoCo), FemTech.Net, Transform DH, GO:DH, Associação das Humanidades Digitais, etc., the issue of making the digital humanities more diverse and more accessible remains a problem of concern. Questions about race and ethnicity, and about the very material foundations —people, geographies, and tools— that make the digital possible are sometimes lost in discussions about how the digital domain is constituted and

distributed across the globe. Therefore, the possibilities, or lack thereof, for taking advantage of digital resources and digital connectivity by people who have been, and continue to be, under-represented in the digital humanities remains to be a topic of some urgency. More conversations are needed across the digital humanities to address and bridge this gap, and to propose more productive ways of thinking about the impact, benefits, and drawbacks of the digital domain as it becomes an increasingly important layer of our cultural and social lives.

It is in the spirit of examining what we have been alluding to as a digital gap that our panel brings together specialists and practitioners of the digital humanities to discuss specific issues in countries and communities that have traditionally been at the periphery of normative cultural representations in various parts of the southern Americas. How are Afro-Latin American and Afrolatin@ communities using methodologies associated with the digital humanities to advance their own goals? How do current digital tools as applied to curatorial projects, archives, and the dissemination of information allow these same communities to explore hidden histories and propose new images and (self-) representations? What kind of digital resources —whether in terms of big-data or minimal computing— are these communities using to intervene in debates about the current state, and the future, of the digital domain? These are some of the fundamental questions inextricably tied to problems of accessibility that our panel will address by means of specific case studies. The diversity of methodologies we will bring to the conversation becomes a strength that productively challenges rigid limits on how the digital humanities are to be defined, which is particularly important when inclusion is at stake.

The session itself will consist of a brief introduction by the panel organizers explaining the rationale for the choice of papers and how these shed light on issues of accessibility in the digital humanities. This will be followed by three presentations, two of which will be in English and one in Spanish (María Cecilia Martino):

International Organization Theory (IO) and Online Afro-Latin America

Yvonne Captain

This presentation will discuss the connection between International Organization Theory, Digital Humanities and the connection of diverse Afro-Latin American political, social and cultural organizations. Professor Captain will show how, using digital tools to reach out to global communities, organizations such as

Afroféminas [a Spanish/Latin American organization] help new identities emerge and connect productively. Her paper will hone in on the work of Afro-Costa Rican poet Shirley Barr Campbell, who connects to a variety of organizations via digital tools as a way to draw larger audiences and start discussing what it means to be a citizen of the Diaspora. Her paper focuses on how the advent of digital networks has impacted the formation, membership and digital appropriation of organization that have existed and connected well before our digital boom. In addition, she considers those organizations that have failed in connecting themselves digitally as examples that “proffer a cautionary lesson on what not to do” and as examples on how to handle digital waste.

Towards the Organization of an Afro-descendant Digital Archive in the Cape Verdean Association

María Cecilia Martino

This presentation focuses on the experience of an association of Cape Verdean migrants to Buenos Aires (Argentina) in organizing information by means of a digital archive. In her paper, Mrs. Martino discusses issues of access to technology, the creation of a basic system of metadata and the connection between members of the community based on materials such as photographs, videos, and documents that tell the story of migration and resilience of Cape Verdeans immigrants to Buenos Aires. Finally, her paper will discuss how digital methodologies would help enrich ethnographic practices concerned with representing people’s discourse.

Afrolatin@ Digital Humanities

Eduard Arriaga

The final presentation discusses projects carried out by and about Afrolatin@ and Afro-Latin American communities in the Americas, questioning the very definition of Digital Humanities in order to include such initiatives. By analyzing the studied projects, this paper questions conceptions of humanity, humanities, access and digital appropriation residing at the core of current digital humanities projects and put to test by Afrolatin@ and Afro-Latin American endeavors. Finally, the paper reviews some of the principles of the minimal computing approach to identify its limits, advantages and impacts in Afrolatin@ digital projects.